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ABSTRACT

This paper states the position of the National Council of State Supervisors of Foreign Languages (NCSSFL) in regard to bilingual education. The Council feels that the ethnic languages and cultures of the people living in the United States should be preserved in order to strengthen and enrich the total American society. It therefore favors maintenance rather than transitional bilingual programs. The following eight points are considered integral parts of an effective bilingual program: (1) scholastic achievement in two languages is commensurate with the age, ability, and grade level of students; (2) bilingual education is an integral part of the school's regular program; (3) development of a positive self-image in students is a primary consideration; (4) fluency and literacy in two languages are expected; (5) professional staff development is included; (6) cross-cultural understanding is stressed; (7) educators in all types of language programs make efforts toward common goals; and (8) provisions are made to allow all students the opportunity to develop bilingual/multicultural proficiencies to a high degree in a well-ordered program. (CFM)

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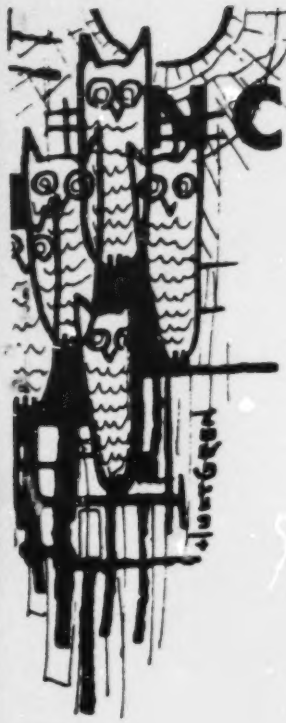

NCSSFL

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BILINGUAL EDUCATION

A Position Paper

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NATIONAL COUNCIL OF STATE SUPERVISORS OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES

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BILINGUAL EDUCATION

A Position Paper

National Council of State Supervisors of Foreign Languages

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I. INTRODUCTION

The United States is a young democratic nation with a single dominant language spoken over a wide expanse of territory. Yet, within this nation live millions of persons whose first language is other than English. Many of these people also speak English and participate enthusiastically in two cultures. Native Americans, the only indigenous group in our country, speak a great variety of languages and participate in many different cultures. Each one of the languages spoken in the United States is rich in its own right and interacts vitally with English. The United States of America is a multilingual and multicultural society, a nation of nations; yet education in the United States has traditionally accommodated but a single language and cultural group.

The National Council of State Supervisors of Foreign Languages (NCSSFL) maintains that, if the United States is to remain a world leader, it must develop for its citizens the opportunities to learn to communicate adequately in many tongues and in the context of many cultures. It must provide for orderly development of native or ancestral languages as well as a choice of other languages for all its people. It is understood, however, that development of the official language of the nation--English--is important to all citizens.

In America we feel there exists a strong need for all segments within local communities to study the unique linguistic and cultural content of each part of the total society, each to be studied from

its own perspective for its own instrinsic value. We hope that all Americans will come to recognize that cultural and linguistic diversity strengthens and enriches the total society--a society which will mature to include full participation of all its parts equally in a truly democratic spirit.

II. DEFINITION OF BILINGUAL EDUCATION

The National Council of State Supervisors of Foreign Languages defines bilingual education as an educational program in which two languages are employed in the instructional process. Bilingualism is defined as the ability of one individual to communicate in two languages.

NCSSFL recognizes the existence of several types of bilingual programs reflecting various philosophies of bilingual education. These fall within the categories of transitional, maintenance, or enrichment. It is understood that degrees of bilingual proficiencies in students will vary according to the type of program chosen by a particular group, school, or community.

NCSSFL supports maintenance bilingual education, since this type of program allows students to maintain their first-language skills while their education continues in both English and the other language. Transitional programs, on the other hand, are a bridge to English, with the first language being rapidly phased out and all instruction eventually conducted in English. Maintenance programs also are perceived to be concerned with the provision of equal opportunity and preservation of the nation's diverse linguistic and cultural resources. The Council further supports enrichment bilingual education for all Americans desirous of obtaining linguistic and cultural proficiencies in a second language, regardless of their first or home language, and the development of bilingual education programs which reflect common goals.

NCSSFL believes that the contributions of as many groups as possible within the nation should be reflected in school curricula. The Council wishes to foster intellectual and emotional acceptance of diversity to heighten American perception of each group's contributions to the fabric of the country and to provide an understanding of the multiple facets of the nation while at the same time avoiding ethnocentricity and polarization.

NCSSFL proposes acceptance of bilingual education in American education to preserve linguistic resources and to develop broader, more encompassing opportunities in an era of interdependency and instantaneous communications both in local and international communities.

III. LINGUISTIC AND CULTURAL GOALS

The linguistic and cultural goals of bilingual education are to develop bilingual and multicultural competencies which will enable students to interact effectively with members of the cultures involved.

The following eight points are integral parts of every effective bilingual program and are not listed in any special order of importance:

- scholastic achievement in two languages is commensurate with the age, ability, and grade level of students
- bilingual education is an integral part of the school's regular program
- development of a positive self-image in students is a primary consideration
- fluency and literacy in two languages are expected
- professional staff development is included
- cross-cultural understanding is stressed
- educators in all types of language programs make efforts toward common goals that will enable all groups to work together and capitalize upon linguistic and cultural diversity in our nation as a strength (implied here are longer sequences of foreign language

education and an establishment of broader bases for study of a particular language specialty) provisions are made to allow all students the opportunity to develop bilingual/multicultural proficiencies to a high degree in a well-ordered program

IV. CONCLUSION

NCSSFL supports the preservation of ethnic languages and cultures as a positive element in American education. Acceptance of this diversity as a mosaic of several contributing groups strengthens American society.

NCSSFL supports the concepts of bilingual education and the goals of equal learning opportunities for all Americans in a multicultural nation.

NCSSFL supports bilingual education as a legitimate and desirable form of education for all Americans and regards growing world interdependence a powerful indication of the need for proficient multilingual/multicultural individuals.

NCSSFL supports the development of dual language and culture programs as forces for diversity and enrichment in American education within which an individual has a right to retain one's cultural heritage. NCSSFL recommends greater provision in American education for linguistic and cultural proficiency for all within the wide spectrum of skills, all of which are to be viewed positively in a racially, linguistically, and culturally diverse nation.

NCSSFL recognizes the need for new educational programs, for teacher training, for new educational models in our schools, and for longer sequential programs of language education in a multicultural setting.